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ABSTRACT

Noting that those objects and images currently accepted in the world of fine art might not contain those things posterity will consider significant, this paper offers a practical workshop activity that creates a culture from each individual's imagination. The activity explores images influenced by others or by individual values that reflect a cultural mix, taking into account "traditional" forms and aesthetic considerations. The paper proposes three aspects that individual participants should experience in the workshop: cultural forms that reflect identity; compositions that are original and use emblems of identity; and creating through trial, reflection, intervention, and modification. Slide photos and posters of objects and images of specific cultures were shown at the workshop, and participants worked with collage and mixed media to compose a work that reflected a real or imagined culture. (BT)

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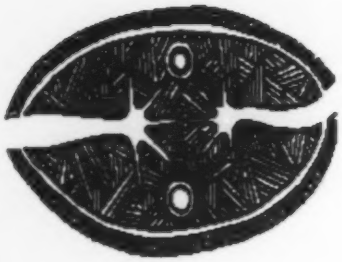

"Creating Cultural Compositions"

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CREATING CULTURAL COMPOSITIONS.

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The three aspects I would like us to experience in this workshop are:
CULTURAL forms that reflect identity,
COMPOSITIONS that are original and use emblems of identity,
CREATING: through trial, reflection, intervention and modification.

Cultural artefacts might be thought of as those relating to institutionalized creations that people make and value as members of a society.
We will view slides photos and posters that show objects and images particular to specific cultures and we will work with collage and mixed media to compose a work that will reflect a real or imagined culture.

OBJECTS AND IMAGES
Some popular objects and images are not generally termed "art" and therefore not discussed in relation to work that students might undertake in the art class. There is a possibility that objects and images of particular interest to students are more likely to be addressed in the Visual Language aspects of the English curriculum. In primary schools boundaries between 'subjects' need not occur to a large degree. However in most Secondary schools boundaries do exist and I see a need to consider cooperation between departments.

If, in the art class, we choose only those objects and images that are currently accepted in the world of fine art we might be missing those things that the future may consider significant. Art that is inaccessible to the general populace is unlikely to stand the test of time.
Orson Scott Card says, "In Elizabethan England, *true* literature, *serious* literature, was poetry. The vulgar audience could only understand the theatrical stage – it was the artistic equivalent of bear-baiting. Yet it was the stage that produced most of the greatest works of the age. In the Augustan age in England, *true* art was high tragedy; ...Vulgar romances were despised. But it was out of the romantic, not the tragic tradition that the novel arose – with all its prosaic crudeness – and, eventually, triumphed. In each case, "high" art, "serious" art had stopped attempting to communicate with the unschooled public. In each case, the public embraced these "low" artists who tried to speak to them. And in each case, out of the "low," "vulgar," "popular" tradition came most of the great achievements of the age. Judith Simpson echoes this idea when she writes, "A world of fine art that is outside life is meaningless."

If, in the art class, we choose only those objects and images that are currently accepted in the world of fine art it is also likely that we will miss those that surround us and have greater impact on our lives than "artworks".
Paul Duncum argues that ordinary, everyday aesthetic experiences are more significant than high art in forming and informing one's identity and view of the world beyond personal experience. Everyday aesthetic sites are more influential in structuring thought, feelings and actions than fine arts precisely because they are everyday. It is because they are so ordinary that they are so significant, he says, because the more common they are, the more completely integrated they are with the rest of life, the more powerful they are in both informing and forming minds. Kerry Freedman points out that students interact with multi disciplinary and inter-cultural images daily through current technologies and that the character and content of this 'international visual culture' are now part of global social knowledge. He argues, like Duncum, that these should be critically addressed in schools.
Perhaps all objects and images created by people are worthy of study. Students should be involved in the study and creation of all types of objects and images; some, we tend to label "Technology", some "Media Studies" or "Visual Language" and some "Art". Some studies are termed, "Social Studies".

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The NZ Curriculum for Social Studies includes the achievement aim: "Students will compare the features of their own culture and heritage with those of others. They will discover how communities reflect the cultures and heritages of their people and find out how and why culture and heritage are developed, transmitted and maintained. Culture is dynamic and students will learn how and why cultures adapt and change. They will understand how culture influences people's perceptions of, and responses to, events, issues and activities."
The Arts: dance, music, stories, objects and images develop, transmit and maintain culture and heritage. Study of the Arts and the contexts from which they arise are valid and worthwhile Social Studies. The boundary between Art and Social Studies becomes blurred.

If, in the art class, we choose only those things that are currently accepted in the world of fine art we might miss those that have a significant influence on a large number of students currently in our multi-cultural classrooms.
Many indigenous people did not have a word for "Art" as Western culture does and so there seems to be some debate as to whether artefacts from these sources are an appropriate focus for study. "Constructs that exist in one culture do not necessarily exist in other cultures. Art and creativity are two such constructs. Although there is no single definitive notion for these constructs in Eurowestern culture, there is a general agreement on what might be considered art. This can lead, and has led in the past, to art educators observing art objects in other cultures and then assuming that they are art objects because they resemble art objects in their own culture. This is not necessarily a valid assumption." Tony Rogers & Rita Irwin. We may say that many groups did not have a term for "art". It is likely there was no word for "science" or "mathematics" or for the word, "culture". Does this mean that studying these objects is an inappropriate activity for today's students? No. It seems to be the label that bothers people. Many works we would label "art" are, in fact, thought within their culture to have significant value and are considered "treasures or "Taonga" as Maori say.
I would suggest that the words "art forms" influence our perception of what is meant. Perhaps we might simply encourage the study and creation of objects and images.

Paul Duncum suggests that some art teachers, while proclaiming democratic aims may have no real intention of shifting from their present fine art studies:
"In general, what is manifest with the inclusion of folk, indigenous and popular art is a post-modern pluralism, an urge to be democratic and see cultural values in terms of students' own preferences and lived experience. Again, practice often does not match policy. Would it be cynical, for example to suggest that one reason for defining visual art in broad terms is to placate those who seek pluralism, while allowing those who specialise in fine arts to maintain their practice? If so, visual art in a post-modern educational climate will fare badly."
Dennis Fehr claims that, "Art teachers must use the arts to provide both aesthetic experience and cultural critique." He goes on to recommend that "Postmodern artists, professors, administrators, teachers and parents (can) join hands...to weave with modern weft and postmodern warp a sprawling cultural quilt that shelters our children with the warmth of democracy."
I wonder if in our current political climate, art in schools is becoming subservient to social issues. Is it just possible that Art will be seen primarily as a tool that might be used to enhance social understanding and integration? Art, like science that serves a master, however benign, becomes stagnant. Although beautiful works might be created, although the purposes are noble, political forces and the boundaries of cultural convention shackle the artist. They may not allow for the free soaring of a creative spirit.
Leon Phillips, professor of chemistry at the University of Canterbury, asks why NZ is heading down the same path that was proved ineffective by the experience of the Soviet Union. Their fundamental error he says, consists of requiring scientists and artists to be forever subservient to the demands of the state, as interpreted by unimaginative functionaries" who believe that," scientific research... should be directed in such a way that important technological advances will occur in politically desirable areas." The "naïve politicians" see economic advantages by requiring universities to confine research to selected areas of applied science, "without bothering with silly questions about what makes the universe tick." He lists among the outcomes of this policy, "chronic failure to identify new opportunities, a conspicuous absence of the pleasure and ferment of creation, and work that is dull, dull, dull." He points out that concentration on applied science or purely representational art is not bad as individual endeavour, but that the survival of a society's art or science depends, like ecology on diversity and efforts to extend boundaries. Success in these areas "requires luck, flair and the courage to take a wild leap in the dark." Is there a parallel between state requirements mentioned here and requirements of current post modern curricula where there is an apparent emphasis on study of social contexts rather than exploration and expression?
I would suggest that using arts to "provide cultural critique" arises from political pressure to "study" art rather than work at art because we find it rather hard to explain its intrinsic value. We are not willing to say that it is valuable

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and worth spending time on just because we want to. Yet this is the reason we do most of what we do, when we do what we do when we don't have to.
Exploring the notion of art and understanding cultural influences on artworks are appropriate fields of study; so is the study of the impact on society of sport, advertising and scientific advances. Studies like these are for spectators, academics and social analysts. They may be anthropological, historical or political but are not likely to be artistic.
They are not the prime concern of artists.
They are inappropriate studies for ego-centric children aged 5 and 6.
As academia runs riot we are apt to forget that kids are just kids. Kids like play; kids like fantasy kids like challenge. Kids like fun. Kids like tricks and new things to do. Kids want to try out new things and kids, like us, will stick at things they want to do. They get bored with Stuff.

Art activities can model how traditional forms and cultural influences affect works and procedures, (exploration, developments and refinements) that artists may undertake in resolving ideas. They can also reflect the idea that people have different values and conceptions of themselves and their society. Rather than "Study" such ideas I believe it is more useful for young children to work in a mode that encourages such exploration through play and artistic activity. The time will come when some will pursue academic goals and spend their valuable hours in front of research materials and computers rather than the easel.
Let us use every opportunity to give our students time exploring possibilities and relating their stories with Art Media.

SUMMARY
All objects and images created by people for a wide variety of reasons are worthy of attention.
Social influences are evident in much of what is created.
Some of these things are termed Art; art educators treat some, more than others, as serious art.
We need to be cautious when making such judgements.
All (art) works can be viewed from an aesthetic viewpoint and from a social viewpoint.
This latter study gives greater understanding of and knowledge about the reasons for the objects' or images' forms and purposes. Such studies have relative value depending on the purposes of the educators and the interests or ages of the students. If the purposes are political, and social understanding is the aim, such studies would seem better located in Social Studies programmes (where curriculum boundaries are clearly defined).
If the purposes are primarily aesthetically oriented, practical art class activities may develop understanding in a personal and meaningful context.

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In this practical workshop activity we are going to create for ourselves a culture from our imagination.
We will explore images that are influenced by others or influenced by our values and reflect this cultural mix.
We will take into account "traditional" forms and aesthetic considerations and compose a work based on these.
We will be doing this in a framework that requires us to consider a range of options.
We'd better start before we become spectators and students rather than doers and potential artists.

CREATING COMPOSITIONS

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In this workshop we will look at a range of objects and images. We will briefly look at their form and messages. Two of the factors that influence objects and images created within a cultural context are traditional forms and traditional beliefs. We will see how these are shown in various works.
SLIDES PHOTOS AND POSTERS: Display of images: Motorbike poster and others (skate boarders etc) Maori reproductions.

View and discuss the meanings of a range of objects and images from different cultures (emphasis Maori) to reflect the idea that "objects and images transmit social values and beliefs." (abstract)
As the wider world impacts on all cultures including indigenous people, these traditional beliefs and forms become adapted to new views and to the Western concept of making "artworks". These are exhibited, bought, sold and valued in new ways even thought they are grounded in tradition.
View students' works that incorporate images chosen to reflect identity or give personal messages.

PRACTICAL WORKSHOP
- Work with a partner, two others or as an individual.
- Decide upon real or imagined values, treasures, gods, interests or social issues.
- Select or create an image or motif and some text, (poem, saying).

PROCEDURE:
- Place the image or motif on the A3 paper. (do not fix in place)
- Add text (rearrange if you wish).

VIEWING & REFLECTING:
- View and discuss all solutions and arrangements, looking at balance and emphasis.

INTERVENTION:
- Employ black and one colour.
- Alter, adapt and cut the original image and text.
- Employ a pattern created from paper shapes

VIEWING, REFLECTING & INTERVENTION:
- Employ a new shape or image that is unrelated to the first but use some linking device: colour, shape, line, metaphor...
- Include some sort of frame and another colour or tone.
- You may further alter, adapt and cut the original image.
- You may draw some text with ink (separate paper) and place.

VIEWING, REFLECTING & INTERVENTION:
- Use at least one circular or triangular shape somewhere in your composition.
- You may repeat previous images and shapes, parts of or associated shapes.
- You may create new patterns and additional images that relate in some way to the ideas.

VIEWING, REFLECTING & INTERVENTION:
- You may delete or discard part/s of your work,
- Use pastels and/or markers to add lines, details and a range of tones.
- Increase the complexity of at least one pattern.
- You may imply a message.
- Adapt and complete by fixing in place.

DISPLAY, VIEW & DISCUSS

"Only teachers who are prepared to study the folk and indigenous artistic traditions of their students can expect to make connections between vital aspects of their students' lives and the Western fine art tradition. Similarly, only teachers who are prepared to seriously study popular culture can expect to be taken seriously by students when they criticise the values constitutive of much popular art. " *Paul Duncum*

Teachers who choose practical activities that explore and allow expression of real or imagined cultures, group and personal ideas and make connections between these and the works of folk and indigenous traditional forms will help their students make connections in a meaningful context.

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